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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: AMBASSADOR'S DECLARATION FOR
FY07 REVALIDATION OF CONTINUING DISASTER

¶1. During the last year, both disarmament of former combatants from the 2002 rebellion and the identification and registration of voters failed to materialize. As such, Cote d'Ivoire remains divided into three parts: the government-held south, the rebel-held north, and the UN controlled Zone of Confidence (ZOC) separating the two. Currently, there are some 13,000 peacekeeping troops in Cote d'Ivoire, including about 9,000 with the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI) and 4,000 with the French Licorne forces.

¶2. The decision to prolong President Gbagbo's mandate for up to 12 months beyond October 31, 2005 did not lead to the expected elections by October 2006. The United Nations Security Council on November 1 endorsed an extension of President Gbagbo's term in office for up to one more year in order to allow for elections to be organized.

¶3. The western region of Cote d'Ivoire is still highly volatile. Militias remain strong despite disarmament initiatives. In January 2006, in the town of Guiglo, host to camps for refugees and internally-displaced persons (IDPs), pro-government militia orchestrated a wave of anti-UN violence, causing several deaths and widespread damage and resulting in the withdrawal of the UN forces posted there. ONUCI and UN forces in Liberia (UNMIL) have been conducting joint patrols along the Liberia-Cote d'Ivoire border to prevent arms trafficking and the recruitment of Liberians into local militia groups.

¶4. Nationwide, business activity and living standards are declining and the poverty level reached 41% in 2006. A toxic waste dumping scandal in September 2006 further exacerbated political tensions in the country, and protests and strikes occur frequently in Abidjan and elsewhere in Cote d'Ivoire. The provision of basic social services to the general population remains very low, especially in the north, west, and in the ZOC.

¶5. Given these developments and their negative impact on the welfare of the civilian population, I request a continuation of USAID/OFDA's foreign disaster assistance in Cote d'Ivoire for FY 2007.

HOOKS